

Articles Some Aspects of Linguistic Politeness in Hindi and Japanese

著者	Nivedita Kumari
journal or publication title	論叢 現代語・現代文化
number	16
page range	9-16
year	2016-03-31
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/2241/00138237

SOME ASPECTS OF LINGUISTIC POLITENESS IN HINDI AND JAPANESE

Nivedita Kumari

Abstract

The present paper attempts to compare the linguistic forms in Hindi and Japanese based on the available data from the secondary sources. A first step discussion on the use of linguistic forms in the two languages aims to describe broad categories of honorification and few syntactic structures used to express politeness. The two languages are presented separately but the data suggests that there is enough scope for studies on similarities and differences based on this theme.

Keywords: Hindi, Japanese, Politeness

1. Introduction

There are various ways of expressing linguistic politeness in both Hindi and Japanese. The linguistic forms that express politeness can be divided into two: 1) forms that have the primary linguistic function of showing politeness, such as honorifics; 2) forms that have a literal meaning based on the syntactic structure but have a different pragmatic meaning as per its use and the context of use. In order to give an overall picture of the use of these expressions, the present section discusses them based on the linguistic units involved in the expression. In phonology, suprasegmental features like pitch-variation functions as a way to show politeness but it is not included in the description here as for the need of technical support to minutely observe the use of these features. Though unnecessary to mention, the significance of suprasegmental features in keeping one's language polite is acknowledged in the present study. Phonemic units, on the other hand, have a smaller role to play in the use of linguistic politeness. At the word level, the use of affixation, inflection and suppletion are discussed in this section for all the parts of speech. The choice of words and various word formations to render the language polite are discussed. At the sentence level, some of the sentence constructions that function as a way of expressing politeness are discussed in this section. Even though the basic meaning of any choice of words and different sentence constructions remains the same, the expression of politeness through these choices will be brought out in this section.

Honorification includes the indigenous ways of expressing respect and humility among the interactants through language. There are roughly three forms based on honorification: neutral

forms, humble forms and exalted forms. All the languages have their own way of honorification based on the cultural nuances of the community. Even though the use of honorifics is decided by the social norms of the language community, the honorific forms have some inherent meaning of politeness even out of context. Hindi and Japanese have an inbuilt system of honorification in the language itself. However, this system is more elaborate in Japanese than in Hindi, as it has elaborate choices, with a number of word-formation processes involved in honorification.

The other lexical ways of expressing politeness in the two languages are the use of diminutives like *chotto* in Japanese and *thoDaa/zaraa* in Hindi. For example, in Japanese and Hindi, asking someone to wait can be less face-threatening by adding a diminutive.

(1) *zaraa rukna.*

DIM wait

'Wait a little.'

(2) *chotto matte.*

DIM wait

'Wait a little.'

There are subject-verb agreement rules that are followed to show politeness, where an honorific subject has an honorific verb showing agreement in the level of politeness as well. Among sentence constructions, using questions or negation are indirect ways of conversing with a person as they appear to give more options to the hearer.

Linguistic politeness in Hindi

Honorification in Hindi is shown by the suffixes or titles attached to the name (proper noun), as well as honorific forms of pronouns and verbs as shown in the table below (Table 1).

Table 1 Honorifics in Hindi Noun, Pronoun and Verb

	Noun	Pronoun	Verb
Neutral	<i>name/ surname</i> <i>Ram, Misra</i>	<i>tum/ tu</i> 'you'	<i>do/ de</i> 'give'
Polite/Honorific form	name/ surname +suffix (<i>Ram-ji, Misra-ji</i>) Professional title+suffix (e.g. <i>doctor sahab</i>)	<i>aap</i> 'you HON'	<i>dijiye</i> 'give. HON'

Apart from these, there are some lexical forms in Hindi-Urdu¹ as shown in Jain (1969) where verbalization of respect in Hindi was focused upon. Depending on the kind of relationship, asymmetrical or symmetrical, the speaker uses exaltation forms, humble forms and neutral forms. For example, *ghar* 'house' is neutral, *daulatkhana* 'wealth house/palace' is an exaltation form and *garibkhana* 'humble-house, hut' is the humble form. The exaltation form is used when referring to the property of the hearer, but the humble form is usually used when referring to

the house of the speaker. Verbs like *give* also have different forms – *ada karna* (exalted form), *dena* (neutral form) and *pesh karna* (humble form) ‘to offer’, indicating different degrees of politeness.

The other forms that indicate honorifics are plural forms of Pronouns and Verbs. For example, *ve*, which literally means ‘they’, is used for a single person when used to show respect. Similarly, in (*ve*) *aayenge* ‘(they) will come’, the verb is inflected for the plural subject to show respect. The verb form for ‘come’ for a singular subject is *aayega* (male) or *aayegi* (female) (See Table 2).

Table 2 Plural forms of pronouns and Verbs functioning as honorifics

Singular	Plural	Plural functioning as honorific
<i>vo aayega</i> he.3P come.FUT.MASSG ‘he will come’	<i>ve aayenge</i> they.3P come.FUT.MAS.PL ‘they will come’	<i>ve aayenge</i> he.3P.HON come.FUT.MAS.HON ‘he(hon) will come’

The change in the number of the subject (singular, plural) is reflected even in adjectives in Hindi.

(3) *bhai-saab mujh-se do saal baDe haiN*

Brother- HON I-POST P two year elder.PL.HON be.PRES.HON

‘Brother is two years elder to me.’

Similarly, some adverbs like, ‘*zaraa*’ as shown in example 1, are used as diminutives and function as politeness markers, even though they do not have different forms to express levels of politeness.

Hindi has a three- way distinction of Verbs and Pronouns, which agree with each other. The following illustrates the linguistic forms that are used for honorification (Misra 1977).

Table 3 Three levels of honorification of Pronoun and Verb Agreement in Hindi

	PRONOUN	VERB
1	<i>tu</i> ‘you2’	<i>de</i> ‘give. non-honorific 2’
2	<i>tum</i> ‘you1’	<i>do</i> ‘give. non-honorific 1’
3	<i>aap</i> ‘you’	<i>dijiye</i> ‘give. honorific’

Misra (ibid: 65) says that there is a correlation between the use of terms of address and second person pronominals in Hindi and the “social attitude and status” of the interactants. Srivastava and Pandit (1988: 203), describing the use of five syntactic structures in Hindi (imperative, optative, ‘should’ construction, simple present and passive), argue that the hierarchy of the degree of politeness of different syntactic structures depends on “the social context of a sentence in terms of role relationship between the participants,” “social meaning of the structure,” and whether the benefit of the acts flows to the speaker or the hearer, or

whether it is neutral.

The subtle ways of making the language polite is also a set of sentence constructions that are not directly addressed to the hearer, but give the hearer the option to agree or disagree with the speaker. For example, in a context where tea is prepared and offered to the hearer, an imperative as in (4) is not as polite as (5) and (6). However, (7) may be taken as the most polite of all, as it uses the collective form and as the speaker includes himself or herself also with the hearer.

- (4) *chai pii lijiye*
 tea drink.PRES take.IMP.HON
 '(you) have tea'

- (5) *chai pijiyega kya?*
 tea drink.FUT.HON INT
 'Will you have tea?'

- (6) *chai nahi pijiyega?*
 tea NEG drink.FUT.HON
 'Won't you have tea?'

- (7) *chai piya jaaye.*
 tea drink.PRS.PERF go.COLL
 'Lets drink (have) tea.'

However, depending on the context, including the relationship of the interactants, the degree of politeness in (4) – (7) may vary. For example, if the interactants are not very familiar they may not find the use of (7) appropriate. Even (6) involves a slight insistence on the part of the speaker that the hearer drink tea and would not normally be used in formal relations. Even (4), when addressed to a senior in a formal and distant relationship may sound slightly assertive. In such a situation, the question form (5) leaves enough option for the speaker to express his or her desire to have tea.

2. Linguistic politeness in Japanese

The word *keigo* in Japanese is usually translated into English as 'honorifics' or 'honorific language.' The use of *keigo* and the importance attached to it for the ideology of nationality in Japan has been highlighted in many instances in literature on Japanese national character (*nihonjinron*). Wetzel (2004, 2008) describes how *keigo* was classified, studied and practiced after the Meiji period and Second World War, giving evidence mostly of the link between the standardization of Japanese and the development of the ideology of *keigo* in the standardization process.

Based on Martin (1975), the various levels of honorification are classified in standard Japanese. The figure below shows the classification.

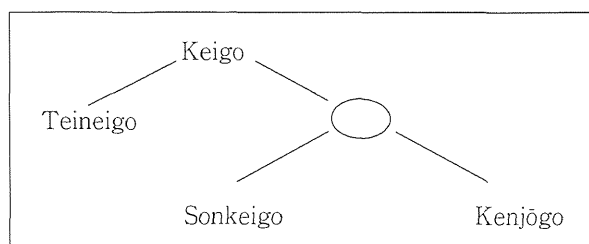


Figure1: Classification of *keigo* as in Wetzel (2004:4)

In the established Japanese account (used in Japanese *kokugo* 'national language' construction) as in Wetzel (2004:4), the levels of *keigo* are illustrated in the examples for the Verb 'go' below.

- Sonkeigo, 'honorific language,' where the level of the addressee or referent is raised.
- (8) *Sensei-ga sochira-ni irassharu.*
 teacher-NOM there-LOC go.HON
 'The teacher is going there'
- Kenjōgo, 'humble language,' where the level of the speaker is lowered.
- (9) *Asu sensei- no tokoro-ni ukagau koto- ni shi-ta.*
 tomorrow teacher-GEN place-LOC visit TOP-PART do-PAST
 'I decided to visit the teacher's place tomorrow.'
- Teineigo, 'polite language,' where '-masu' and '-desu' forms are used to show formality and are always used in formal written discourse.
- (10) *Sensei-ga achira-ni irasshai-masu.*
 teacher-NOM there-LOC go-PRES.HON
 'The teacher is going there.'

(8) – (10) are only examples of the three kinds of *keigo* in Japanese. Each of these kinds of honorification has a specific set of vocabulary. To explain further, let's look at Table 4. The formal-informal bifurcation shows '*teineigo*,' the inflections that show formality. Plain forms are the neutral forms. Polite-honorific forms are '*sonkeigo*' forms, which give respect to the person who is introduced. Polite-humble forms are '*kenjogo*,' which show that the speaker is being humble and introducing a person called Tanaka-san.

Table 4 Three forms of *keigo* vocabulary for the sentence '(s)he is Tanaka'

	Informal	Formal
Plain	<i>Tanaka-san da</i>	<i>Tanaka-san desu</i>
Polite-honorific	<i>Tanaka-san de irassharu</i>	<i>Tanaka-san de irasshaimasu</i>
Polite-humble	<i>Tanaka-san de gozaru</i>	<i>Tanaka-san de gozaimasu</i>

Table 4 shows the variations only of copula '*da/desu*.' However, these variations are found in other word forms also. This clear distinction and further choices within each kind of *keigo* make the system of honorification quite elaborate in Japanese. Even though all these forms are not in regular use, they still give a vast feeling to foreigners who are learning Japanese or even young Japanese who learn *keigo* at school.

● Polite forms at word level

At the word level, various parts of speech have a clear distinction in plain and polite forms in Japanese, and these forms are in regular use as well. As shown in Table 5, there are plain and polite forms for proper nouns, nouns, pronouns, verbs and adjectives. An adverb like *chotto* functions as a diminutive as was illustrated in (2).

Table 5 Parts of speech in plain and polite form

		Plain form	Polite form
1	Proper Noun	<i>Tanaka</i> 'surname,' <i>Rie</i> 'firstname'	<i>Tanaka-san</i> 'surname-HON'
2	Nouns	<i>kazoku</i> 'family' <i>booshi</i> 'hat'	<i>go-kazoku</i> 'HON-family' <i>o-booshi</i> 'HON-hat'
3	Pronouns	<i>omae</i> 'you'	<i>anata</i> 'you'
4	Verbs	<i>agemasu</i> 'give'	<i>sashi-agemasu</i> 'HON-give'
5	Adjective	<i>genki</i> 'fine'	<i>o-genki</i> 'HON-fine'

A use of suffix '-san' with a name or a surname is a common way of addressing a person in formal relations. Other suffixes used with names are '-chan' for kids and girls, '-kun' for young boys, and '-sama' when addressing a person from a royal family or God. The prefix '-o' and '-go' are used when the speaker refers to things or state related to the hearer. In example 2 in Table 5, family and hat of the hearer is given respect by using the prefix '-go' and '-o,' respectively. The verb, as in example 3, has a suffix added to make it more polite. However, there are other verb inflections as illustrated in Table 4. There are cases of totally different lexical items for a more polite form. For example, a verb form *shirimasu* 'to know' is a polite form but *gozonjidesu* is higher in the degree of politeness. Similarly, pronouns in 3 in Table 5 are two different lexical items for 'you.'

The variation in sentence construction in Japanese also shows a similar variation in degree of politeness between an imperative and an interrogative as was discussed in Hindi. When asking a hearer to write his/her phone number, a question form would be more polite than an

imperative. However, depending on the context, when giving an instruction, an imperative would be considered to be more appropriate than a question. Negation and passive clubbed with interrogative are used commonly to express politeness.

- (11) *denwa bango-o kaite kudasai.*
 phone number-ACC write.CP please.IMP
 'Please write (your) phone number.'
- (12) *denwa bango-o kaite itadake-masu-ka?*
 phone number-ACC write.CP receive-AUX-INT
 'Can I receive (your) writing (your) phone number?'
- (13) *denwa bango-o kaite itadake-mas-en-ka?*
 phone number-ACC write.CP receive-COP-PRES-NEG-INT
 'Can I receive your writing (your) phone number?'
- (14) *denwa bango-o o-kaki-ni nari-masu-ka?*
 phone number-ACC HON-write-PART become-COP-PRES-INT
 'Can I get your phone number written?'

3. Summary

The examples of lexical affixes, words, inflections and sentence constructions are broadly used to summarize the general honorification in Hindi and Japanese. Also, as it is well understood, with the context, the degree of politeness of each of these forms varies depending on their appropriateness in the given context. This suggests that there are possibilities for a parallel between the use of honorifics and politeness strategies in the two languages. The discussions show that the three-way distinction of honorification into neutral, exalted and humble forms is broadly similar in Hindi and Japanese. However, as elaborating on all the forms of linguistic politeness falls outside the scope of this study, a detailed description of only a kind of speech act or a detailed comparison of similar pieces of discourse from the two languages can help in the understanding of the pragmatic use of these linguistic forms.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1P/2P/3P	-	first person/second person/third person
ACC	-	accusative
AUX	-	auxiliary
COLL	-	collective

COP	-	copula
CP	-	conjunctive participle
DIM	-	diminutive
FUT	-	future
GEN	-	genitive
HON	-	honorific
IMP	-	impersonal
INT	-	interrogative
LOC	-	locative
MAS	-	masculine
NEG	-	negation
NOM	-	nominative
PART	-	particle
PAST	-	past
PL	-	plural
POST P	-	post-position
PRES	-	present
TOP	-	topic marker

REFERENCES

- Jain, D. K. 1969. Verbalization of respect in Hindi. *Anthropological Linguistics* 11, 79–97.
- Martin, Samuel E. 1987. *A Reference Grammar of Japanese*. Tokyo: Tuttle Language Library.
- Misra, K. 1977. *Terms of Address and Second Person Pronominal Usage in Hindi: A Sociolinguistic Study*. New Delhi: Bahri Publications.
- Srivastava, R.N. & I. Pandit. 1988. The pragmatic basis of syntactic structures and the politeness hierarchy in Hindi. *Journal of Pragmatics* 12, 185–205.
- Wetzel, P. J. 2004. Modernization of Keigo. In Patricia Wetzel (ed.) *Keigo in Modern Japan: Polite Language in Meiji to the Present*, 66–87. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Wetzel, P. J. 2008. Keigo Ideology. In J. Mori and A.S. Ohta (eds.), *Japanese Applied Linguistics: Discourse and Social Perspectives*, 111–131. London: Continuum.

¹ The term Hindi-Urdu is used among the Indian linguists to refer to Hindi which is not different from Urdu.